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In Defense of Military Men Who Miss the Headlines

By NORMAN S. PAUL

We Americans have always prided ourselves on the simplicity of our tastes. Our moral principles are clear and unequivocal. We are in favor of what is right and against what is wrong.

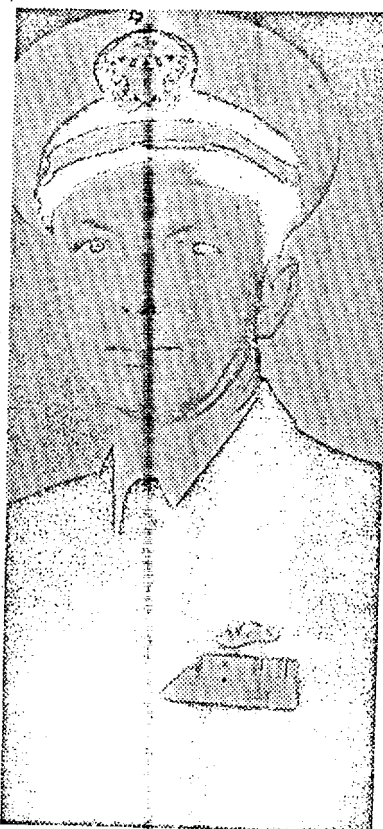
This direct approach is reflected in our taste for entertainment. Since the days of the first flicker

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box, the days of Dustin Farnum and William S. Hart, we have cheered the cowboy in the white hat, the good guy, and booed the bad guy, who is inevitably frustrated, in the end, in his scurrilous designs against motherhood, the honest rancher, and chastity. To give the audience an occasional respite from the dreadful tension of the contest between good and evil, which frequently finds our hero in a number of messy situations, we have always provided comic relief, usually in the form of an affable dolt who appears just long enough to win our hearts but not long enough to gum up the plot.

Today we still love Westerns, but the basic plot has been translated into a number of up-to-date situations, and in some cases the plot itself has been obscured in the process. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are lining up to see two smash hit films, "Seven Days in May" and "Dr. Strangelove." Each deals, in its own way, with problems of the greatest national and international interest and importance. There the resemblance ceases, except for certain of the cast of characters—specifically the villains and the comic relief. In each film, they wear the uniform of the United States.

A central figure in the near tragedy of "Seven Days in May" is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, an Air Force general. Behind the facade of the rugged physique, the handsome face and the battle ribbons, we see a thoroughly immoral animal, a captive of an American



COMDR. JOE WILLIAMS
Commands Robert E. Lee

and a traitor to his President and his country. A co-conspirator, in the uniform of an Admiral in the United States Navy, who didn't have the guts to follow through, sips wine in his official quarters, displays a paunchy and generally dissipated appearance, and lies to his President.

Villains in Uniform

In "Dr. Strangelove" we are treated to villains and comic relief, and other characters less simple to define—all in military uniforms. A Strategic Air Command base commander, obviously a general in the Air Force, goes mad and decides to start a war. The Air Force Chief of Staff, hearing a remarkable physical and vocal resemblance to one of our outstanding living military leaders, reluctantly abandons an assignment with what may be loosely described as his

ing called by his Commander-in-Chief in the war room. There, he provides the comic relief so essential to a plot which grinds its way inexorably to the end—of everything.

I don't object to these films. I have, of course, seen both. They are provocative, which is good, and of the highest technical quality. But what disturbs me deeply, however, is the apparent trend in current publications and motion pictures, of which these are but two manifestations, to make the military uniform of our country, and those who wear it, the boobs, buffoons and villains of the piece.

I am concerned with the human element in Defense. The largest part of my job is to recommend policies involving people in uniform—recruiting them, paying them, promoting them, assigning them, keeping up their morale, providing them medical care, educating them, retiring them, and so on through the entire range of human activity. As a civilian, I have had a unique opportunity to visit and discuss their problems with hundreds of our military people of all ranks and grades. We read often today of our Chiefs of Staff (although I wonder how many of us could name them all without a little priming) and of the young officers who are engaged in more spectacular pursuits, such as our astronauts.

Three Who Count

But we hear and read virtually nothing about the thousands of others whom we have to thank, today, for the opportunity to pursue our lives in a world at peace. Take, for example, Walter Beckham.

Col. Walter Beckham is the Chief Scientist of the Air Force Weapons Laboratory, a position of great responsibility and demanding the greatest scientific and technological proficiency. No egghead is Col. Beckham. He joined the Air Corps in 1941 as an aviation cadet, at that time with only a high school education. As a fighter pilot during World War II, he was a triple ace, with 18 air victories to his credit, when he was shot down and taken prisoner by the Germans in 1944. His decorations include the Dis-

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